

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**



REPRESENTATIVE JASON ROJAS
HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER

Joint Committee of Education
Public Hearing Testimony
In favor of Senate Bill 948

Chairs Sanchez and McCrory, Ranking Members McCarty and Berthel, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 948, AN ACT ADDRESSING EDUCATION FUNDING AND RACIAL EQUITY IN CONNECTICUT.

The Education Cost Sharing formula has been a 30-year attempt at addressing the unconstitutionality of a school financing system that overly relies on the local property tax to fund local education. The formula has never been fully funded and it was only in 2017 that the legislature, to the credit of many on this committee, committed to actual use of a formula directing additional resources to our state's most under-resourced districts. Districts like the one my children attend in East Hartford and the other that I represent in Manchester. The actions taken in 2017 were a significant accomplishment.

But our work is not yet complete. Our current school financing system funds children differently depending on the type of public school they attend. We have more than 10 different ways to fund a public-school student. The result is that most students, often our most under-resourced, are short changed including most students who participate in one of our many choice programs. These same schools are the ones that have been challenged most over the past year. The COVID pandemic did not create the inequities in our systems, but it did exacerbate them—in almost every way possible.

We are all aware of how property taxes, race, and education intersect to perpetuate inequities in our state. Property taxes account for 56% of all K-12 revenue in the state – putting Connecticut in second place nationally for relying on local property taxes. What does this mean for some districts? Our urban core communities and many inner-ring suburbs historically have needier student populations, more tax-exempt properties, and grand lists with significantly less value than neighboring communities.

Our current ECS formula is not doing enough to support students based on their need and makes distinctions based on the type of school a student attends. We have a responsibility to continue to make the needed adjustments to ensure that we are truly committed to providing equality of opportunity and addressing the systemic weaknesses that have long plagued education funding in Connecticut.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.